



United States Department of Agriculture

Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands

National Grasslands Visitor Center

Wall Ranger District

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News Release

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Grouse Viewing Blinds Available for Free Public Use

Wall, Sd., March 23, 2017 – The National Grasslands Visitor Center and Wall Ranger District again offer free use of grouse viewing blinds this spring. The blinds allow visitors an up-close view of the amazing courtship dances of the sharp-tailed-grouse. Last year's grouse blinds were a huge success on the Buffalo Gap National Grassland, drawing in folks from all over the greater Blacks Hills and Badlands area. This year, the blinds will be open to the public beginning April 1st, and will stay open until the mating season ends.

Every spring, male sharp-tailed grouse perform a mating “dance” to attract the females. The areas where the birds perform this ritual is called a lek, and the same lek site can be used for decades. The dances typically begin while it is mostly dark and continue for an hour or more after sunrise.

According to Buffalo Gap National Grassland wildlife biologist, Tony Willman, “Each male has a small territory within the lek it defends vigorously against other trespassing males. Border skirmishes are frequent but virtually harmless. When a female arrives on a lek, the males begin frantically displaying to gain her attention and approval. The “dance” is a rapid foot stomping run in curving directions. The head will be down, wings spread . . . tail stiffly pointed up and shaking from side to side producing a rattle.”

The Wall Ranger District of the Buffalo Gap National Grassland will provide ply-wood viewing blinds on these lek sites so that the public can watch the birds do their spring mating dances. The blinds hold up to four adults, the blinds have several small viewing windows for watching and photographing the sharp-tailed-grouse.

“Grab your coffee, bring a blanket, and settle in for an incredible experience. It’s not every day that you get to see the sharp-tailed-grouse dancing their little hearts out,” says Park Ranger, Kathleen Hanson.

The blinds are free to use, but reservations are required on a first come, first served basis. Those who reserve a blind will have it for the whole day, but the birds are most active in the morning. An orientation package with maps to the lek will be provided, but please be aware, this is not a guided experience.

For reservations on the Buffalo Gap National Grassland, please contact the National Grasslands Visitor Center at 605-279-2125 or stop in Monday through Friday, 8am to 4:30pm. The National Grasslands Visitor Center is located at 708 Main Street, Wall, SD 57790.

For more information people may call the Visitor Center at (605) 279-2126.

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